

Procrastination and Motivation

Procrastination and motivation do not just happen; rather, they are deliberate. They are also not static traits; for example, a person can exhibit procrastinating behavior and be intensely motivated and productive a few hours later. Procrastination is usually a result of boredom, intimidation, or feeling overwhelmed. If you recognize that you are procrastinating, ask yourself “What is causing me to procrastinate?” Recognizing the sources and signs of procrastination are the first steps toward implementing changes in your studying techniques.

Techniques to Manage Procrastination and Increase Motivation

The Wedging Technique

Using a study wedge allows you to break up larger tasks into smaller manageable tasks over a study session. It is important to be free from distractions because they can interfere with your willingness to start tasks. The wedging technique is a powerful tool as it allows you to be in control—you are determining your breaks and your study periods and you are building willpower.

1. **Zone of Initiation:** This is the critical first five minutes when you are beginning a task. At this point you have made the effort to start your study or work session free from distractions such as television, cellphone, music, etc.
2. **Zone of Inertia:** After you have finished your first five minutes of the task, you can decide to either continue to work or take a short break from the task. If you choose to take a short break, try the five-minute technique again when the break is finished. Continue to take breaks until you get into your work and decide that the five-minute breaks are not needed.

Remember to take breaks after 45 to 60 minutes of studying, it allows your brain time to absorb and comprehend what you have just worked on. It is also important to set time limits for your breaks at 5 to 15 minute intervals.

3. **Zone of Willpower:** Once you have followed the five-minute technique, your willpower to finish the task will improve and you will feel more accomplished at the end of the task.

The Chunking Technique

Where the Wedging Technique breaks effort into smaller units of time to generate momentum, the Chunking Technique breaks the actual task into smaller units. To chunk:

1. Describe the task in its entirety;

2. Look for subtasks;
3. Make a list of the subtasks; and
4. If any of the subtasks still seem overwhelming, break the subtask down even further.

Here is an example of chunking for writing the first draft of a short term paper:

1. Read assignment criteria (page max/min, topic, style) (5-10 minutes)
2. Select general topic (5-20 minutes)
3. Do reading to understand basics of topic (1-2 hours)
4. Refine topic (5-20 minutes)
5. Meet with librarian to find relevant sources (20-45 minutes)
6. Read two sources per day and add info to annotated bibliography (5X 45 minutes)
 - a. Read source 1 (45 minutes)
 - b. Read source 2 (45 minutes)
 - c. Read source 3 (45 minutes)
 - d. Read source 4 (45 minutes)
 - e. Read source 5 (45 minutes)
7. Use concept map to explore information and create thesis statement (1-1.5 hours)
8. Use thesis statement and annotated bibliography to make outline (1 hour)
9. Write sections in outline one at a time, including references (2-3 hours)
10. Revision (1-2 hours)

The chunking technique breaks large, complex, and intimidating tasks into smaller, simpler, and manageable tasks.

Motivation

Most students start the semester with good intentions and a strong motivation to succeed. For many students, however, their motivation starts to fade around heavy study and assignment periods. This means that they need to find a way to motivate themselves to keep on track. It is important when selecting tools for motivation that you are focused on actions, which you have control over, and not your feelings. Don't view motivation as out of your grasp; rather, view it as a good habit that you can develop with practice.

Maximizing Motivation

- Select a program and courses that are interesting to you.
- Be clear about your short-and long-term goals for studying.
- Create effective study habits by setting up a study routine including:
 - Creating a time management plan with regularly scheduled study sessions; and
 - Finding suitable study space(s) free from distractions.
- Develop a reward system for short- and long-term goals.
- Form a study group to hold each other accountable.
- Don't be unnecessarily hard on yourself and remember to encourage yourself.
- Ask for support if you need it. There are many valuable resources on campus available free of charge to help you overcome procrastination and maximize motivation.